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Economic Commission for Europe

Executive Committee

Seventy-sixth meeting
Geneva, 31 March 2015
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda
Matters relating to the Committee on Environmental Policy

Decision approving the renewal of the mandates and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators, and the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews

Background

1. At its twentieth session (Geneva, 28–31 October 2014), the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) agreed on:

(a) the renewed mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment until the twenty-first session of CEP (Geneva, 27–30 October 2015) and its revised terms of reference;

(b) the renewed mandate of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators until the twenty-first session of CEP and its revised terms of reference;

(c) the renewed mandate of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews until the regular session of CEP in 2018 and its terms of reference;

and requested the secretariat to submit them to the Executive Committee for approval.

Draft decision

2. The Executive Committee, at its seventy-sixth meeting on 31 March 2015, approves the renewal of the mandates of: (a) the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment; (b) the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators; and (c) the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, and their respective terms of reference as contained in annexes I, II and III.

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Annex I

Mandate and Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) renews the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for one year until the twenty-first session of CEP in October 2015.

2. The Working Group should help strengthen environmental observation capacity, including monitoring networks, and establish and maintain effective environmental information systems in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (the target countries), to ensure the factual basis for environmental policymaking, and for informing the public about the state of and changes to the environment. In particular, the Working Group should:

(a) Support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), in line with the SEIS objectives to underpin regular reporting and assessments in accordance with international monitoring and assessment requirements and obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements, including improvements to:

(i) The necessary data collection, where needed, through modernization and upgrading of national monitoring networks;

(ii) Information systems;

(iii) Institutional cooperation and coordination mechanisms;

(b) Review the progress in developing SEIS based on the targets and performance indicators (ECE/CEP/2014/8) adopted by CEP at its twentieth session;

(c) Help enhance capacities to produce good quality, concise but informative state-of-the-environment reports and other assessments, where relevant, based on the effective use of environmental indicators and their analysis and the application of modelling;

(d) Promote the use and implementation of recommendations and guidelines, as well as other methodologies on environmental monitoring and assessment, as endorsed internationally, in particular by Environment for Europe (EfE) ministerial conferences.

3. The Working Group should further contribute to an appraisal of monitoring and assessment requirements within the framework of the EfE process as well as other relevant processes.

4. The Working Group should be open to all ECE member States. Its members should be the officials in ECE countries dealing with environmental monitoring and assessment. It will also involve in its activities experts from the national statistical agencies and other relevant services.

5. In delivering on its mandate, the Working Group should cooperate with international forums and networks, such as, in particular: the European Environment Agency; the United Nations Environment Programme; the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Statistics Division; the World Health Organization European Centre for Environment and Health; relevant multilateral environmental agreements, especially those of the ECE; the Global Earth Observation System of Systems; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and relevant major groups.

6. In its operation, the Working Group will be guided by the relevant procedures established by ECE.

7. The ECE secretariat will provide secretariat assistance and conference facilities to the Working Group at the United Nations Office at Geneva, including interpretation and translation, in accordance with ECE rules and practices.

8. Donors will be invited to provide support for the Working Group's activities.

9. CEP will review the present terms of reference at its twenty-first session in October 2015.

Annex II

Mandate and Terms of Reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators

I. Mandate and reporting

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) renews the mandate of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators until the twenty-first session of CEP in October 2015.

2. The objective in the work of the Joint Task Force is to assist national statistical agencies and institutions responsible for the production of national state-of-the-environment reports in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (the target countries) in further improving their environmental statistics and the production and sharing of the agreed indicators. This work should support the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the pan-European region as the basis for regular reporting and assessments under the international monitoring and assessment requirements, including the obligations under the relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

3. The Joint Task Force will continue to report on its accomplishments to its parent bodies, CEP and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).

4. CEP will review the present terms of reference at its twenty-first session in October 2015.

II. Planned activities and outputs

5. To achieve its objectives, the Joint Task Force will undertake the following activities:

(a) Review production and online sharing of indicators in common agreed formats to gradually cover all the environmental indicators in the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (Indicator Guidelines);[1]

(b) Discuss challenges in data collection, processing and validation as well as online sharing of the indicators and provide and adapt the relevant guidance material;

(c) Continue to strengthen, in cooperation with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and other relevant institutions, the capacities of the countries concerned in the production and sharing of environmental data, including statistical data, and indicators by providing technical assistance and training, in a manner coherent with the principles of SEIS and regular environmental reporting and assessments;

(d) Consider additional environmental indicators for inclusion in the Indicator Guidelines, as required to meet policy demands;

[1] The revised Guidelines are available in the form of an online database from http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html.

(e) Maintain a network of environmental experts in statistical offices and Government agencies dealing with environmental assessments to further broaden the exchange of experiences and approaches.

6. The Task Force will prepare the following outputs:

(a) Data and indicators are produced and shared in common agreed formats on the websites of national agencies, with links to the national websites made available on the Joint Task Force website;

(b) Methodologies, papers and presentations with recommendations for data collection, processing and validation are developed and shared online;

(c) The capacities of the target countries to produce and share environmental statistical data and indicators are improved;

(d) Additional indicators are included in the Indicator Guidelines, as necessary;

(e) Networks of environmental experts and statisticians are in place to ensure effective exchange of experiences and approaches.

III. Timetable

7. The mandate of the Task Force is renewed for one year until the twenty-first session of CEP in October 2015.

IV. Method of work

8. The Joint Task Force is expected, subject to the availability of donor support, to have regular face-to-face meetings (two per annum) as well as workshops focusing on specific issues during its mandate. The Joint Task Force will also work via e-mail and other electronic means. It will closely cooperate with the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to support the establishment of SEIS for regular reporting and assessments applying the SEIS principles. Donors will be invited to provide voluntary contributions to support the work of the Joint Task Force.

V. Membership

9. The Joint Task Force will be open to all ECE countries. Other interested countries are also welcome to participate. EEA, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the International Energy Agency, the Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Health Organization European Centre for Environment and Health and the secretariats of relevant MEAs and other institutions will be invited to participate.

VI. Secretariat support

10. The Environment Division and the Statistical Division will jointly service the Task Force. This will include:

(a) Servicing the Joint Task Force meetings (with interpretation and translation), including the preparation of meeting agendas and reports;

(b) Preparing background documents and compilation papers for the Joint Task Force at its request;

(c) Mobilizing financial support for members of the Joint Task Force to facilitate their participation in the meetings and workshops;

(d) Helping the target countries, under projects with EEA and other interested institutions, to improve their capabilities for producing indicators.

Annex III

Mandate and Terms of Reference for the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews

1. The Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (Expert Group on EPRs) is mandated until the end of 2018 to support the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme in accordance with the terms of reference described below.

Membership

2. The core membership of the Expert Group on EPRs for 2015–2018 should consist of 10 to 14 participants, with due consideration given to a balanced geographical representation from the countries in the region. It is also suggested that, when new members are chosen, due regard should be given to experts from countries that have recently been reviewed, as well as to those which have undergone or will soon undergo reviews.

3. The Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) delegates may participate in the meetings of the Expert Group as observers and act as advisers to review the report and its recommendations.

4. In addition, experts nominated by the CEP delegates, and agreed by the members of the Expert Group in consultation with the secretariat, may participate in the meetings of the Expert Group on any country under review.

Terms of reference

5. The mandate of the core members of the Expert Group is renewed for a period of four years for the purposes of:

(a) Carrying out the expert review process, prior to the peer review to be undertaken by CEP;

(b) Providing guidance to the ECE secretariat and CEP on all substantive and organizational matters arising in the implementation of the ECE EPR Programme;

(c) Assisting the ECE secretariat in coordinating the ECE EPR Programme with processes that have a bearing on it under way in other international institutions, inter alia, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization, the European Environment Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

6. The guidance of the Expert Group to the ECE secretariat and CEP will include:

(a) Identification of opportunities and requirements for improving the conduct of EPRs;

(b) Assessment of environmental trends relevant to the EPR process in non-OECD member countries, including through the organization of joint meetings, seminars and workshops at the regional and subregional levels, where these are demand-driven.

7. The core members of the Expert Group are nominated by the ECE member States. The secretariat will invite international institutions pursuing related work to participate in the work of the Expert Group.

8. While taking decisions on an EPR report under review and its recommendations, the Expert Group shall take into consideration the inputs by the reviewing countries and CEP delegates who participate in the meeting.

9. The Expert Group shall elect its Chair and Vice-Chair.

10. The Expert Group will report annually on its activities to CEP, and may raise any issue with CEP that it deems necessary for the implementation of its mandate.

Timetable

11. The mandate of the Expert Group will cover a four-year period, from the beginning of 2015 to the end of 2018.